

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 INRE-00

NSCE-00 USIE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 DHA-02 OC-05 CCO-00 SY-05

OPR-02 SCCT-01 A-01 SCA-01 OMB-01 ACDA-05 FEAE-00

EB-07 /103 W

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O R 241148Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7833

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NEW YORKK

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

COMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX ZERO

CTF SIX ONE

CTF SIX TWO

CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO

FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA

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DIA WASHDC

CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 15528

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON ON CHRISTMAS EVE: SILENT NIGHT???

REF: BEIRUT 15487 (1358Z)

1. CHRISTMAS EVE DAY HAS FAILED TO WORK ITS MAGIC IN LEBANON. SECURITY SITUATION IN CAPITAL TOOK SHARP TURN DOWNWARD AFTERNOON DEC 23, WHEN ARMED ELEMENTS TOOK TO STREETS TO FILL VACUUM CREATED WHEN 200 ARMY COMMANDOS WERE WITHDRAWN FROM CITY CENTER TO REINFORCE ARMY UNITS AROUND ZAHLE (REFTEL). LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES, GENDARMES DOWNTOWN BROKE AND RAN. SITUATION DEC 24 REMAINS MUCH THE SAME DESPITE DECISION OF HIGHER COORDINATION COMMITTEE TO ORDER INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES BACK INTO THEIR ABANDONED POSITIONS. DEPUTY COMMANDER BEIRUT MILITARY HQ TOLD DATT THIS MORNING THAT ARMY TROOPS SENT TO VICINITY OF ZAHLE WILL NOT BE RETURNING TO BEIRUT TODAY. BEGINNING AT ABOUT 1100 LOCAL THIS MORNING, WE BEGAN TO RECEIVE SCATTERED REPORTS OF FIRING IN VERDUN AREA OF CITY AND WIDESPREAD INDICATIONS OF SNIPING AND ROADBLOCKS IN MANY PARTS OF TOWN. BEIRUT RADIO ONCE AGAIN STATING ALL STREETS ARE UNSAFE.

2. CITY, PARTICULARLY HAMRA AREA, CONTINUES TO BUZZ WITH RUMORS OF IMPENDING EXPLOSION TO COINCIDE WITH CHRISTMAS. THIS STORY, WHICH WAS FIRST PICKED UP BY EMBOFF ON DEC 14, IS NOW BEING WIDELY REPEATED, WITH ACCOUNTS OF WARNINGS FROM "LEFTISTS/ PALESTINIANS" TO FRIENDS IN HAMRA VICINITY. WHETHER SOME ESCALATION IS ACTUALLY PLANNED OR RUMOR WAS MERE PSYCHOLOGICAL PLOY, IT COULD BECOME SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY. SOME OBSERVERS
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WERE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT CONSPIRACY HAD BEGUN THIS MORNING WHEN BEIRUT RADIO ANNOUNCED ONE MAN KILLED AT 0830 HOURS AT OR NEAR JEANNE D'ARC STREET (BISECTING BOTH BLISS AND HAMRA).

3. WE HAVE NO RPT NO DETAILS RE ALLEGED SNIPER VICTIM, BUT CHIEF OF SECURITY (LEBANESE) FOR AMERICAN UNIVERSITY (AUB) WAS SLIGHTLY WOUNDED

MORNING DEC 24 AS HE DEPARTED HIS HOME NEAR AUB. CULPRITS WERE APPARENTLY FOUR MEN IN CAR PARKED ACROSS FROM HIS HOME AND POLICE ARE ASSUMING INCIDENT WAS CASE OF SCORE-SETTLING. CONDITION OF VICTIM IS NOT RPT NOT SERIOUS, BUT LOCAL RUMOR MILL IS EXAGGERATING INCIDENT AND IT MAY SOON MAKE THE WIRE SERVICES. SAME SOURCES BEARING TIDINGS OF FEMALE AUB STUDENT ALLEGEDLY KIDNAPPED. LATTER STORY IS WITHOUT FOUNDATION, BUT ILLUSTRATIVE OF SUSCEPTIBILITY OF LOCAL POPULACE TO TALES OF MAYHEM.

4. ZAHLE IS REPORTEDLY QUIET MORNING DEC 24 AND UNEASY CALM PREVAILS IN MANSOURIYAH WHERE PHALANGE AND PPS/COMMUNIST ANTAGONISTS REPORTEDLY CONTINUE TO EYEBALL ONE ANOTHER FROM FORTIFIED POSITIONS. TROUBLED TRIPOLI IS TENSE, HAVING WITNESSED DEC 23 BIZARRE CONFRONTATION (THREE KILLED) BETWEEN SUPPORTERS OF PRIMIN KARAME (ARAB LIBERATION PARTY) AND PALESTINIAN/LEFTIST GAGGLE. FIGHTING WAS REPORTEDLY PRECIPITATED WHEN PALESTINIAN ATTEMPTED TO TAKE ONE OF KARAME'S HENCHMEN INTO CUSTODY AS PART OF INVESTIGATION INTO ASSASSINATION DEC 20 OF NORTHERN GOVERNOR. BY ALL ACCOUNTS. KARAME USED HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, MALEK SALAM (ESTRANGED BROTHER OF SAEB BEY), TO CONTACT BOTH THE SYRIANS AND 'ARAFAT TO CALL OF THE DOGS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 15528

5. DESPITE HOPES ONLY TWO OR THREE DAYS AGO
THAT NEW SYRIAN INITIATIVE MIGHT AT LAST BRING
RESPITE, NEW MOOD OF GLOOM, POSSIBLY PROVOKED BY
DISMAL CHRISTMAS SEASON, APPEARS PERVADE POLITICAL
SCENE. CABINET IS SCHEDULED TO MEET DEC 24 WITH
KARAME MEETING FRANGIE FOR FIRST TIME SINCE
PRIMIN'S RETURN FROM DAMASCUS (THEY HAVE SPOKEN BY
PHONE) PRIOR TO SESSION MOST OBSERVERS
AGREE CABINET SESSION WILL BE PRO FORMA AFFAIR
AND WORD IS BEGINNING TO LEAK OUT THAT KARAME'S
VISIT TO SYRIA REALLY ACHIEVED LITTLE. JUMBLATT
HAS RENEWED PUBLIC ATTACKS ON PRESIDENT AND ADDED
HARSH WORDS ABOUT KARAME AS WELL. SOME KNOWLEDGE-
ABLE OBSERVERS CLAIM THAT JUMBLATT HAS DETER-
MINED TO WAGE CONCERTED CAMPAIGN TO ACHIEVE
FRANGIE'S OUSTER, EMPLOYING TRIED AND TRUE

METHODS OF PRESSURE USED AGAINST BESHARRA AL KHOURY. ACCORDING TO THESE SOURCES, JUMBLATT WILL SOON INITIATE CONTACTS WITH NON-LEFTIST PERSONALITIES TO ATTEMPT TO FORGE COALITION FRONT TO ACHIEVE HIS ENDS. JUMBLATT, MEANTIME, IS MEETING AZZEM KANSO OF PRO-SYRIAN BAATH DEC 24 TO PLAN FOR EXPECTED "PROGRESSIVE" PILGRIMAGE TO DAMASCUS SHORTLY.

6. FRENCH AMBASSADOR STATES FRENCH MEDICAL SCHOOL PILLAGED OF VALUABLE EQUIPMENT SUCH AS MICROSCOPES, X-RAY, ETC., AND REOPENING OF SCHOOL IS QUESTIONABLE.

7. DEPUTY DR. FARID SERHAL INFORMS US HIS SMALL HOSPITAL/CLINIC IN BEIRUT TOTALLY PILLAGED AND EQUIPMENT WORTH MORE THAN ONE MILLION LEBANESE POUNDS HAS DISAPPEARED.

8. RUMORS OF CHRISTMASTIME ATTACKS ON RAOUCHE
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AND RAS BEIRUT HAVE CAUSED MANY MERCHANTS NORMALLY OPEN IN THESE AREAS TO CLOSE TODAY. ALTHOUGH BANKS HAVE NOW BEEN CLOSED FOR THREE WEEKS, STREET MONEY CHANGERS SAY THEY HAVE VIRTUALLY NO BUSINESS IN THESE PAST FEW DAYS. ONE HYPOTHESIZED THAT THERE IS NO DEMAND FOR FOREIGN EXCHANGE (INCLUDING SYRIAN POUNDS) BECAUSE THOSE WHO ARE GOING TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY HAVE ALREADY DONE SO. SAS HAS CLOSED LOCAL OFFICE AT LEAST UNTIL JAN 6 AND REPORTEDLY MAY MOVE ITS OFFICE PERMANENTLY TO DAMASCUS.

9. ALTHOUGH GASOLINE TANKER SHIP ARRIVED MONDAY FROM TRIPOLI AT DORA PORT, SNIPER FIRE TWICE CAUSED TANKER TO CHANGE BERTHS WHILE DISCHARGING YESTERDAY. GOL AND IRAQI GOVT HAVE NOT YET REACHED NEW CRUDE OIL AGREEMENT FOR SUPPLYING IPC REFINERY AT TRIPOLI. OIL COMPANY OFFICIALS BELIEVE IRAQIS WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPLY IPC REFINERY WITH CRUDE EVEN THOUGH NEW AGREEMENT IS UNLIKELY TO BE REACHED BY DEC 31 EXPECTATION DATE OF CURRENT AGREEMENT.
GODLEY

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